Multilingualism and language contact in the Dutch street image

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The linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration is formed by the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings (Landry and Bourhis, 1997). Studying the linguistic landscape gives new insight into multilingualism and language contact. This young research field is attracting interest worldwide.

As a pilot study, I took digital pictures of all the texts on street signs, billboards, shop signs, etc. in one central street in Amsterdam. These pictures were codified according to language choice, order of languages, and other features. The results show the variation of languages used and how they are represented. Preliminary conclusions can be drawn about language relations and contact phenomena such as code-switching in the Dutch street image.

This pilot study is part of my PhD project in which I examine the linguistic landscape of the Netherlands. Urban and rural locations in the city belt Randstad (including Amsterdam) and the province of Friesland are compared with respect to the use of the state language Dutch, the international language English and the minority language Frisian. Other languages, like German, French, Chinese and Arabic, are also considered.